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## Our Thriving Neighbors. A Shaker Elder Tells of the Success of His Colony Adjoining St. Cloud.

Ezra J. Stewart

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# St. Cloud Tribune.

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## **OUR THRIVING NEIGHBORS.**

### **A Shaker Elder Tells of the Success of His Colony Adjoining St. Cloud.**

Editor St. Cloud Tribune: It was in the Autumn of '94 that the Board of Managers of the United Society of Shakers in New York State appointed three of their most experienced, well tried trustees to go South and locate a colony site for the members of that fraternity. Out of a body of 4,000,000 acres land sold by the State of Florida to Hamilton Disston, of Philadelphia, the Shakers, through their trustees, selected an estate of several thousand acres situated in the far-famed Kissimmee Valley adjoining the new town of St. Cloud, in Osceola County, a region abounding in large fresh water lakes. The greater number of these lakes have been connected by means of canals dug by the Disston Company in fulfillment of their agreements. Thus, with the addition of a small amount of work, it will be possible for residents of St. Cloud to sail this magnificent chain of lakes for hundreds of miles—as far south as the Gulf of Mexico and as far north as Jacksonville, on out into the Atlantic.

### **Healthiest Spot in Florida.**

This locality, now famous as the healthiest spot in all Florida, has proved a veritable paradise for an all the-year-round place of residence. The climate, altho as balmy as any found in more 'tropical latitudes, possesses in addition the element of change—a period of cool weather each year sufficient to preserve health and strength. Situated at a moderate altitude, these densely timbered lands of pine and oak offer a natural sanitarium for the world's workers as well as a playground for tourists and people of wealth.

During the Winter of '95 a company of people from the Shaker village at Mount Lebanon, N.Y., arrived in Florida prepared to become pioneers in real earnest. The delightful Winter climate, total absence of snow and



ice myriads of delicately-tinted wild flowers half hidden 'midst the tall Winter grasses, the ever-changing cloud effects seen only at their best in semi-tropical regions, together with a thousand other new and wonderful things native to Florida—all combined to weave a web of enchantment around the new comers.

The Shakers, however, are noted as a practical people who, in common with all bread winners, well know the futility of trying to live on sunshine alone or even upon the transcendent natural beauties of so fertile a domain as the Florida peninsula.

### **Starting a Herd of Cattle.**

Realizing the fact that cattle raising had for years been a thriving industry in Osceola County, the land was fenced and a small bunch of cattle installed as the nucleus of a herd. The many lakes in this County afford excellent drinking water for cattle besides curtailing fencing expenses by many dollars. Altho Florida-bred cattle do not command so much per head in the market as those fed on clover and timothy and corn on our great Western farms, it must be remembered there is no extra expense attached to the care of livestock in this climate during the Winter months.

Native cattle practically care for themselves, altho frequent change of pastures more than compensates for the trouble involved. Two- and three year-old steers are sold to local buyers each year for shipment to Cuba and elsewhere, and for home consumption. Twice each year calves are marked and branded, and this work, if supplemented by good fences, constitutes practically the entire expense of raising beef cattle in this section.

Native cows when taken with first calf and thoroughly milked often develop into excellent milch cows. In this connection it might not be out of place to suggest the dairy business as a paying industry for newcomers who intend settling in the vicinity of St. Cloud, an industry lacking development in a County which should abound in dairy products, lacking chiefly because attention has hitherto been centered on beef cattle.

### **Clearing Land and Cropping.**

Attention was next directed to clearing and fencing land for cultivation, sand land which had to be cleared of timber and undergrowth, muck land more easily prepared for plowing by removing grass and weeds. It was found, however, that in many respects sand land when well fertilized produced better results than muck, with some kinds of fruits and vegetables.



A FINE BUNCH OF CATTLE  
On the Shaker Settlement.

The Shaker pioneers soon had sufficient land cleared to plant a considerable acreage of potatoes, both Irish and, sweet. These, properly fertilized and planted in right season, yielded in abundance and were marketed in surrounding towns.

Cassava, a root rich in starch, also planted on sand land, yielded in great abundance, some roots being nine feet in length, altho commonly not more than from one to five feet long. Somewhat resembling the sweet potato in appearance, cassava is used principally as feed for milch cows, horses, and hogs. The colonists at first produced some fine tapioca and starch from this root for home use; it is said that a preparation similar to rubber is made from cassava.

Good crops of corn and velvet beans were grown for feed as well as beggarweed—a forage plant resembling alfalfa. Cow peas, some varieties of which are an excellent table pea, were grown in large quantities.

Muck lands planted to sugar cane produced wonderfully after the soil became sweetened by exposure to air and sunlight with addition of lime. In the early days successful experiments were made in growing arrow root, peanuts and chufas, the latter a ground nut resembling peanuts without the shells, used for fattening hogs.

## **Gardening All-the-Year-Round.**

From the beginning the Shaker colonists have been successful with garden truck in Florida, planted on a mixture of muck and sand land. Eggplants, tomatoes and beans are unusually good crops, while Winter cabbage is as tender as cauliflower. Onion plants transplanted from cold frames make large onions; the Bermuda and Creole are the two best varieties for this section. Cucumbers, squash, pumpkins, watermelons and strawberries are staple garden products. Some seasons strawberries can be grown for table use six months continuously—from December to June. Blackberries and elderberries are heavy bearers in this latitude.

Okra, a Southern vegetable used chiefly for flavoring soups, is found in most gardens in addition to the common vegetables such as beets, turnips, radish, corn, peas, lettuce, celery, etc. Jamaica sorrel, a thrifty shrub resembling somewhat the currant bush, grows a sour bud from which tempting sauce and jelly is made similar to that produced from cranberries. Spring gardening begins early here, some seasons in January or February, and it is quite true that our gardens can be made to produce some kind of vegetable every month in the year. Planting for Fall gardens commences in September.

## **Semi-Tropical Fruits.**

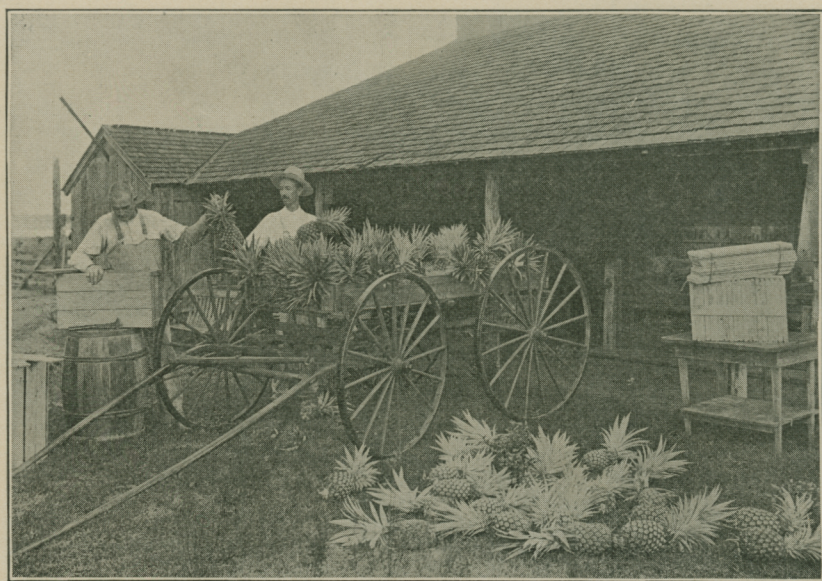
When it comes to fruit raising it may be said without fear of contradiction that Osceola County is capable of becoming pre-eminent in the culture of semi-tropical fruits. For many years this County has been the acknowledged home of citrus fruits—superior-flavored tangerines, oranges, grapefruit and lemons.

The Shakers began soon after their arrival to set out pineapple plants, selecting the Smooth Cayenne, a fancy variety which produces the finest flavored, the most tender pineapples grown. At first experiments were made on low land, and, while it was found that such land produced fine large apples for a time, they gradually became inferior in size and quality. The pinery was then removed to high pine land (sand), where first-class results have been continuous. Of course, the pineapple, being a tropical fruit, needs to be shaded in this latitude, and is protected by sheds of three-inch slats, making a half shade. This arrangement affords protection from the sun similar to that obtained by wild pineapples grown underneath the giant trees of South American forests. Shedded pineapples are admittedly of finer flavor, more tender-meated than those grown out in the open.





PINEAPPLES  
Growing under sheds in the Shaker Settlement.



BRINGING IN PINEAPPLES.

Florida peaches are a profitable crop, being ready for shipment much earlier than those grown farther north; those raised on sand are much superior to any produced on muck. Orchardists having the best success with peaches practice thinning the fruit by pulling off the greater part of a crop, leaving the balance to attain a superior growth. Such peaches command the highest prices in early Northern markets, their fine appearance and good quality always being guaranteed by this system of raising.

### **Bananas.**

While the Shakers have given some attention to peach culture they have more recently been experimenting with bananas, and find this a fruit which offers fair returns for the labor and expense involved.

As a fruit for table use it can hardly be surpassed. Our first experiment was in planting about one-fourth acre of muck land, setting out 160-odd plants, eight feet apart each way. Being hardy these plants started growing immediately, and in 12 months the first bunch of bananas appeared—rather prematurely. The plants by this time had attained a marvelous growth of stock and foliage, reaching a height of some 18 or 20 feet, having five and six giant plants to each hill. During the twelfth month (January) the leaves were practically all killed by a slight frost; they immediately began

unfolding again from the center of the stock, and in two months were as luxuriant as ever. In 15 months from planting splendid bunches of fruit were harvested, and have since then been yielding continuously.

Hart's Choice or Lady Finger banana is the variety best suited for this section, as it is hardy and of superior flavor. Being a dwarf variety, it does not produce so much fruit to the bunch as some larger kinds, but what is lacking in quantity is abundantly compensated for in quality, in the freshness of home grown fruit as compared with that shipped from a distance.

### **Guavas.**

Another fine fruit raised in South Florida is the Guava, of incomparable flavor, resembling somewhat that of the quince. Unlike quinces, however, guavas can be eaten raw; they are delicious when picked fresh from the bushes. Would he who has once partaken of guava Jelly or of guava butter or of sauce made from this delectable fruit meekly return to the common things of life? I reckon not. Some varieties of guava grow wild in this State, there being an unusually large crop reported for this year.

Other fruits grown in this section are the fig, pomegranate, lime, pear, loquat, and kumquat, the latter belonging to the citrus family. Grapes are said to thrive here; especially the Niagara and Scuppernong varieties, but as yet we await experienced and thrifty vineyardists to demonstrate the commercial possibilities of grape growing in this County.

It is, of course, not to be expected that vineyardists and fruit growers generally will find no drawbacks in Florida, but it may be truly said that this State offers exceptional opportunities to those who would engage in fruit raising for Northern markets and for home consumption.

### **Sugarcane Syrup.**

The old-fashioned method of grinding sugarcane with the help of a mule hitched to the end of a long sweep has been in vogue throughout the South from time immemorial. The cane juice is then boiled in large iron kettles over pine-wood fires, necessitating constant attention to prevent such disasters as burning or boiling over. This system produces good new syrup; it, however, lacks in keeping quality on account of the juice not being properly cleaned before boiling.

A small syrup mill was early installed on the Shaker estate fitted out with modern appliances for producing cane syrup by steam. After being





A BANANA PLANT, FOUR MONTHS OLD,  
Growing on the Shaker Lands near St. Cloud. Notice the man among the leaves and  
get the hight.

thoroughly cleaned by an adequate process of straining, the juice is pumped into galvanized boiling pans where it is cooked by steam coursing thru coils of copper pipes. Syrup made in this manner is always in demand, as it has good staying properties in addition to being A No. 1 in quality—not given to blowing out the bung nor exploding on the pantry shelf.

Red Ribbon cane is the kind mostly grown here, as it is hardy and a good producer. Green cane, the best variety for chewing purposes, makes the most delicately flavored syrup, altho on account of being less hardy than other varieties, it is not raised in such quantities. A very prolific kind is the Japanese cane, a small stock which grows in large, tall clumps much like the Japanese bamboo. The syrup is light colored and highly prized by some on account of its flavor. This cane is used much the same as sorghum for feeding cattle and hogs.

We have produced some excellent sugar for household use, enough to demonstrate possibilities in that line, should our energies ever be turned in that direction.

Altogether, sugarcane is one of the surest crops in Florida, and profitable withall.

### **Other Industries on the Shaker Farm.**

Among other industries pursued by the Shaker fraternity might be mentioned logging and the sawing of lumber, the demand for which has always exceeded the supply.

Fishing with seines at some seasons of the year is attended with considerable profit, albeit an industry involving a large measure of uncertainty. The fitting out of a fishing crew with seine, electric launch, boats, etc., involves “right smart” expense; it sometimes grates on one’s nerves to observe the obstinacy of the finny tribe in their preference for deep waters.

The locality adjoining St. Cloud is a paradise for Nimrod, the mighty hunter, for the patient angler, in fact for all who delight to commune with Nature in a land of perpetual sunshine.

Chickens and bees do well in Florida. Goldenrod, palmetto bloom, and orange blossom are the main sources of honey supply. Other blossoms add their quota of nectar almost continually, so that an apiary in this section continues to do business nearly the whole year thru. Moreover, it is not necessary to house bees during the Winter months in this climate.



## **Setting Out Shade Trees.**

Soon after locating in Florida we began casting about for suitable trees to plant in the door yards for shade and ornament. The stately long leaf pine, towering above every other tree in the forest, altho very beautiful, is, nevertheless, rather unsatisfactory for shade on lawns and about dwelling houses on account of a proclivity for shedding its long, slender needles in all directions, and on account of its too sparse foliage.

Among the oaks it was found that the water-oak was most suitable for shade trees, having a dense foliage which retains its dark green color almost the entire year. Altho a deciduous tree, the oak in Florida renews its leaves almost imperceptibly, which fact adds greatly to its value for shade and ornamental use.

The Texas umbrella, a tree having a splendid canopy of fern-like, dark-green foliage, is very popular on account of its beauty, as well as for the large amount of shade which it affords during the Summer season. Chinaberry, mulberry, cypress, maple and cabbage palm each have their particular use about the home place.

The lovely magnolia, while not primarily a shade tree, is everywhere in evidence throughout the South. Its green-and-russet foliage, its magnificent cream-colored blossoms heavily laden with perfume combine to make this majestic tree a valuable addition to one's dooryard.

The camphor tree, from which gum camphor is made, is easily grown in this latitude, as are also several varieties of bamboo, some species of which attain a height of 60 feet or more. These large, stately clumps of giant bamboo nodding their feathery foliage in the balmy, perfume-laden atmosphere seem to beckon the home seeker, the Winter tourist out of the frozen North into a land where delightful climatic conditions obtain well nigh the whole year thru.

Among a large variety of garden shrubs and vines may be mentioned the pink and white oleander, single and double hibiscus, cape jasmine, honeysuckle, crape myrtle, and last, but not least, the yellow, purple and white allamanda, a hardy rapid growing vine said to be native to this peninsula.

In conclusion it might be suggested that a country in which it is possible to work out of doors almost every day in the year should not be rashly designated a pseudo-paradise; it is, in fact, the real thing, especially for those who enjoy living next to Nature, for those who would work in the open, as well as for that class who are in need of physical and mental

recuperation.

When the substantial saving in fuel and clothing is considered, when it is known that horses and livestock in general can be wintered in this climate with little or no expense compared with Northern latitudes, Florida begins to loom up as an economical place in which to live.

Those who, like the writer of this article, have summered and wintered in this section of Florida for a number of years can testify to its desirability as a permanent place of residence. There are, indeed, many people of means in this State who formerly returned North Summers, but who, since learning of the cool breezes from ocean and gulf which Floridians enjoy during the Summer season, have concluded to reside here the whole year thru.

EZRA J. STEWART.

Shaker Colony, Ashton, Fla.







A TYPICAL FLORIDA HOME  
On the grounds of the Shaker Colony.



A TYPICAL FLORIDA HOME  
On the land of the Shaker Settlement.